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THE HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS VALUE OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

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I. INTRODUCTORY

EVERY reader of the New Testament is conscious of a difference when he passes from the first three Gospels to the Gospel of John. The earlier Gospels are distinct in character from one another, and are sometimes at variance in their record of facts; but they all present the same general picture of our Lord's life and teaching. They are termed the "Synoptic Gospels," since they deal substantially with a common material from a common point of view. The fourth evangelist, like the other three, is concerned with the life of Jesus, and reproduces the familiar story in its main outline

and in many of its more striking details. But we feel at once that the portrait is different. Our Lord as he appears in the fourth Gospel is no longer a prophet and teacher, but the manifest Son of God. He speaks not in vivid saying and parable, but in the language of a mystical theology. The message of the Kingdom, which forms the one subject of his teaching in the Synoptic Gospels, falls practically out of sight, and our attention is fixed instead on his own personality, in its relation to God and its significance for the world. We discover, on closer examination, that this Gospel differs from the others, not only in its general view of the nature of Christ's mission, but in its reading of the history itself. The chief scene of our Lord's ministry, which was Galilee according to the Synoptic records, is placed in Jerusalem. The time covered by the ministry is extended from one year to three. Important incidents are

transposed into a new setting; or they are omitted altogether, while others, unknown to the previous Gospels, take their place. Even where the fourth evangelist is in closest agreement with the Synoptists, he never fails to introduce some modification in detail, often of such a nature as to change the whole meaning of the event.

These peculiarities in the Gospel are all the more difficult to explain in view of the traditional theory of its authorship. There can be no doubt that the Synoptic records, on the face of them, bear more convincing marks of authenticity. They describe the incidents of our Lord's life in a natural sequence, and set them in intelligible relation to well-known facts of contemporary Jewish history. Their account of his works and sayings is consistent and life-like, and seems to embody the reminiscences of actual eye-witnesses. A thoughtful reader who studied the Gospels for the first time, with

nothing to guide him but his own impressions, would almost certainly conclude that the Synoptists gave him the facts, while in John the facts were interpreted and idealised. But this judgment which we should otherwise pass with little hesitation, has been complicated by the generally accepted view of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. In the epilogue with which it closes it is expressly assigned to the "beloved disciple" of Jesus,—the disciple who has been identified, from a very early time, with John the son of Zebedee. If we admit this evidence as to its origin, we have little choice but to grant it a higher claim to authenticity than any of the other Gospels. It comes to us, not as a comparatively late compilation, woven out of stray fragments of surviving tradition, but as a first-hand narrative of the life of Jesus, written by that disciple who knew him best.

II. AUTHORSHIP

In modern times the authorship of the fourth Gospel has been the subject of rigorous investigation. The discussion has now been in process for nearly a hundred years, and is by no means closed; but the weight of scholarly opinion is settling down to a conviction that the traditional theory must be abandoned. It is not the purpose of this little book to deal with the "Johannine problem," the most involved and difficult of all the problems which have arisen out of the critical study of the New Testament. A few sentences, however, will be enough to indicate at least the main reasons for the conclusion that the author of this Gospel was not the Apostle John.

(1) The book itself makes no claim to Apostolic authorship. It is now generally agreed that the closing chapter, in which alone such a claim is suggested, is of the

nature of an appendix, added by a different hand to the original work. This is obviously true of the concluding verses of the chapter. They purport to be written not by the author himself, but by some body of witnesses, who set their imprimatur on his book. The appendix was no doubt added at an early date; but we cannot infer with any certainty that its account of the origin of the Gospel is more than conjectural. There would indeed have been no occasion for the calling in of witnesses, if the authorship had been definitely known from the beginning. In any case, it is noticeable that the Gospel is assigned, in general terms, to a beloved disciple. The writer of the appendix seems to find this disciple in John the son of Zebedee, but guards himself against any express identification.

(2) The external evidence for the Johannine authorship is far from conclusive. It ultimately rests on the testimony of Ire-

næus, toward the end of the second century, and there are reasons for supposing that he confused the Apostle John with another John, who was a prominent figure in the early history of the church in Asia Minor. Traces of an acquaintance with the Gospel can be discovered in patristic literature before the time of Irenæus; but these prove at most that the work was current at an earlier date than has sometimes been granted. If the Apostolic authorship was matter of common knowledge, we should doubtless have found constant reference to the Gospel in the literature of the second century. As it is, the few vague quotations and reminiscences which prove its existence, seem also to indicate that it held a subordinate place among the scriptures of the church. The tradition that John wrote our Gospel has therefore little evidence to support it; and we have further to reckon with a counter-tradition. It is known that

at least one sect in the early church refused to admit the Johannine authorship. Little is told us about this sect or the grounds on which it took up its position; but we may reasonably infer, from the mere fact of its appearance, that the Gospel established itself with some difficulty. Its origin was involved in obscurity; and the church consented slowly, and not without misgiving, to accept it as the work of John.

(3) The relation of the fourth Gospel to the other three is of such a nature that we cannot well conceive the possibility of Johannine authorship. On the one hand, as we have seen, the Synoptic account is greatly modified, alike in its general features and in details. An eye-witness of the events could hardly have allowed himself those many departures from what, to all appearance, is the correct historical tradition. On the other hand, the fourth evangelist, while he modifies the Synoptic

account, is manifestly dependent on it throughout. Again and again he borrows the very words of his predecessors. Almost all the incidents he records are derived, more or less obviously, from the Synoptic narrative. Even where he appears to have least in common with the other evangelists, we can usually discover that he is working on some suggestion which they have offered him. An apostle who had his own store of personal reminiscence from which to draw, would not have leaned in this manner on written documents; and there seems to be no escape from the conclusion that the fourth evangelist was not one of the original witnesses of the life of Jesus, but a later, derivative writer. His divergences from the Synoptic record are to be explained by his remoteness from the facts which he describes. He is no longer in a position to see the life of Jesus in its historical surroundings and under its true

character as a human life. The events have all receded into the distance, so that he is free to deal with them imaginatively, in their ideal and spiritual import.

(4) The crucial argument against the traditional theory is to be found in the internal character of the Gospel. Its portrait of Jesus is dominated by certain conceptions of his work and nature which were not possible to a thinker of the primitive age. The evangelist has steeped himself in the teaching of Paul. He has combined the Pauline speculations with those of Alexandrian philosophy. His mind is set, not so much on the literal facts of his narrative, as on the meanings which had been attached to them in the light of subsequent doctrine. Now it may fairly be maintained that an aged apostle, after a life-time of deep Christian experience, would be filled with a sense of the divine significance of the events which he had witnessed. His

remembrance of them would be interwoven, almost unconsciously, with the thoughts and surmises they had awakened in him long afterwards. But in the fourth Gospel we have something more than this natural blending of memory and reflection. The history is subordinated to the theology. The writer appears to value it chiefly as a proof and illustration of the doctrinal ideas with which he approaches it. We cannot believe that one who had known Jesus in the flesh, and who had been nearer to him than any other, would thus have presented the Master's life. His reflections on the meaning of the life could never have displaced his interest in the life itself. As it is, the Gospel is the work of a great religious thinker, who has entered profoundly into spiritual fellowship with Christ. But it lacks the warm colours and the definite outlines of personal reminiscence. The evangelist, like Paul, is "one

born out of due time," who has not witnessed the earthly life of Jesus except through the eyes of others.

The fourth Gospel, therefore, cannot be attributed to the Apostle John, and the real secret of its authorship seems to be irrecoverably lost. Many attempts have been made in recent times to connect it with some particular name; but with our scanty knowledge of the early history of the church, they are hazardous at the best. The evangelist himself remains unknown. All that we can do is to distinguish, within certain limits, the place and time in which he composed his work. From various indications, both internal and external, we can infer that he belonged to Asia Minor, and probably to the region of Ephesus. His date has been much disputed; but the evidence would seem to point, more and more decisively, to some time within the first two decades of the second century.

Though considerably later than the Synoptic records, the fourth Gospel is thus an early work, removed by only one generation from the Apostolic Age. It is even possible that the Gospel as we have it was based on an earlier writing, in which case its original sections would fall within the first century. This opinion is held by several notable scholars in our day; but in view of the uniform character of the work, alike in its language and its teaching, it must be regarded as more than doubtful.

The early date of the Gospel must be taken into account before we refuse it any value as a historical document. At a period when men were still living who had listened to the Apostles, many recollections of the life of Christ must have been current in the church. The evangelist would doubtless make use of the oral tradition, as he did of the written record. There are several

historical questions of capital importance (*e. g.*, the length of our Lord's ministry, the procedure followed at the trial, the date of the Crucifixion) in which the evidence of the fourth Gospel seems preferable to that of the other three. It is by no means improbable that the writer had access to sources of information which enabled him to correct or supplement the account of the Synoptists. From the same sources he may have derived not a few of the sayings and incidents which are peculiar to himself, and which have been set down, too hastily, as free additions. Allowing, however, for all this possible use of authentic material, we cannot unreservedly accept the testimony of the fourth Gospel on any matter of historical fact. It is evident that all the material has undergone a process. From whatever source he derived it, — whether from our Synoptic Gospels or from other traditions, equally trustworthy,

—the writer has moulded it anew and brought it into harmony with his own conceptions. What we have before us now is not the literal history of our Lord's life, but the Johannine interpretation of that life.

III. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

The process to which the history has been subjected will be better understood, if we look briefly at two outstanding characteristics of the Gospel.

(1) In the first place, the writer views all the facts not as they are in themselves, but through an atmosphere of symbolism. It was already observed by Clement of Alexandria, at the beginning of the third century, that "since the bodily things had been exhibited in the other Gospels, John, inspired by the Spirit, produced a spiritual Gospel." This "spiritualising" of the history is manifestly his aim throughout. Impressed by the infinite significance of the revelation in Christ,

he sees a deeper meaning in all the external incidents. He presents them in such a manner that the fact becomes the transparent veil of some inward religious idea. The symbolic value which is thus attached to the life of Jesus can be discerned most clearly in the case of the miracles. As the evangelist regards them they are not merely works of power or beneficence, but "signs," pointing to some truth beyond themselves; and his account of each of them is followed by a discourse, in which this deeper truth is expounded. We are meant to understand that the actual deed of miracle was only the expression, under a visible type, of something that has an abiding reality in the spiritual world. In like manner all the circumstances of the life of Christ — down even to accidental details — were of the nature of signs. Names of places, numbers, casual coincidences, are carefully recorded, in order to

draw attention to the hidden import suggested by them. The history resolves itself at every point into a kind of allegory which cannot be rightly apprehended without a key. In this way we must explain the liberties, strange to our modern mind, which the writer continually takes with historical facts. The event as it happened was to him the adumbration, necessarily dim and imperfect, of a spiritual idea. His interest is in the idea, which he regards as the one essential thing, — the "truth" or inward reality of the fact. He thinks it not only permissible but necessary to modify the fact, so as to bring out more fully or emphatically the idea at the heart of it. "Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no parable," say the disciples to Jesus at the Last Supper.[1] The evangelist here expresses the thought which has guided him constantly in the writing of his Gospel.

[1] xvi: 29.

He has taken the earthly life of Jesus as a great "parable," and seeks to make it intelligible, in its infinite significance for all time.

(2) In estimating the historical character of the Gospel we must further bear in mind that it is written with a deliberate purpose. Although cast in the mould of a biography of Jesus, it is not, like the other Gospels, a simple narrative of events. The evangelist himself declares, in the verse which originally closed his work, that he had kept an aim before him. "These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name."[1] In other words, we have here a history which is meant to illustrate and support a given religious belief. We are prepared to find that the facts as recorded are all brought into correspondence with that belief. Consciously

[1] xx: 31.

or not, the writer so adjusts and colours them as to bear out his own conception of the Person and work of Christ.

IV. SUBORDINATE AIMS

The Gospel is confessedly written with an intention, and we are justified in enquiring whether the declared religious intention may not be combined with some other. The beginning of the second century was one of the critical periods in the history of the church; and it may fairly be expected that a work written about that time will have a bearing on the needs and problems which were occupying the minds of Christian men. When we look below the surface of the fourth Gospel we seem to discover clear traces of this interest in the contemporary life of the church. Several of the more striking peculiarities of the Gospel are not capable of explanation until we read it not only as a history of Jesus, but as a "tract for the times,"

called forth by the practical requirements of the second century.

(1) A number of chapters are devoted almost entirely to controversy, — our Lord asserting his claims in face of the antagonism of "the Jews." This substitution of the nation generally for the "scribes and Pharisees" of the earlier Gospels is itself strange; and our surprise is still greater when we examine into the nature of the controversy. It turns, not as in the other records, on matters of Jewish custom and morality, but on doctrinal questions which first came under discussion at a later time. Jesus meets objections which the Jews bring forward against his unity with God, his preëxistence, the character of his Messianic work, the partaking of his flesh and blood, the apparent failure of his mission. We have here to do not with the conflict between Jesus and his enemies, but with the conflict between Christianity and Judaism. The

objections answered are precisely those which were urged by the Jews against the rival religion: they meet us continually, under various forms, in the controversial works of the second century. It is impossible to avoid the inference that the evangelist, writing at a time when the synagogue was in strong opposition to the church, took occasion to read back into the past the conflict of the present. His Gospel became, in one of its aspects, a reply to the Jewish antagonists, whose arguments were more dangerous than any others to the progress of the Christian mission.

(2) Another remarkable feature in the Gospel is its attitude to John the Baptist. John ceases to be the preacher of righteousness whom we read of in the Synoptic narratives, and is simply a witness to the Light. He foretells the advent of Jésus, and is the first to recognise him. When once he has welcomed and proclaimed him, he feels

that his own vocation is ended, and withdraws from the scene. The greatness of John is generously acknowledged, yet there is an obvious anxiety to subordinate him to Jesus, — an anxiety which to our minds seems superfluous. It only becomes intelligible when we remember that John was the founder of a sect, which continued in being long after his death, and which apparently came into conflict with the Christian Church. The evangelist had in his mind not only the historical John, but this Baptist party. He sought to refute their extravagant claims on behalf of their master, — possibly also to win them over, like John's first disciples, to the allegiance of Christ.

(3) A farther controversial aim may be traced in the Gospel. We know that the First Epistle of John — a kindred writing, which comes to us from the same school, if not from the same hand — is directed against certain heretical teachers. These appear to

have been precursors of the later Gnostics, who denied the reality of Christ's appearance and death, and sought to resolve his message into a vague philosophical system. It is highly probable that the same type of heretical teaching is combated in the Gospel. The writer goes back to the earthly life of Jesus, and follows it step by step through its earthly progress. He lays stress on details which serve to illustrate the Lord's humanity. He offers solemn testimony to the material fact of the death upon the Cross.[1] The whole Gospel centres on the thesis that the Word was made flesh, — that the divine nature has imparted itself to men through a human life. But while the evangelist is thus strongly opposed to Gnosticism, there is reason to believe that he has himself been touched by Gnostic influences. He makes frequent use of well-known Gnostic watchwords ; he draws a Gnostic distinction be-

[1] xix: 35.

tween the two classes of men, — the earthly and the spiritual, the children of darkness and the children of light ; with all his insistence on the reality of the Saviour's life he never loses sight of its ideal significance. This twofold attitude to the Gnostic speculations is one of the chief problems of the Gospel. In order to solve it fully we should require to know something of the personality of the writer and of the particular circumstances in which he wrote.

(4) Thus far the Gospel appears to have a bearing on specific controversies, which agitated the church about the beginning of the second century; but we can discern in it yet another interest, subordinate to the main religious one. Nowhere in the book is there express reference to the "church"; yet there is no New Testament writing which is more impregnated with the ecclesiastical idea. Jesus is regarded throughout as the founder of a community which was

by and by to overspread the world. The disciples whom he calls around him are the nucleus and the eventual leaders of this community. Rules are laid down for the administration of the church ordinances and the direction of its government and life. The seventeenth chapter more especially — the so-called Intercessory Prayer — can only be read aright when we consider it as a prayer for the future church. Jesus, on the point of his departure, looks forward to the great brotherhood which would call itself by his name, and prays for its unity and peace. The apparent universalism of the Gospel must be interpreted in the light of this church idea which everywhere pervades it. There appears, at first sight, to be no writing in which the largeness of Christ's message is so fully recognised, and which sets forth so absolutely the duty of Christian love. But when we look more closely, we see that the evangelist was thinking pri-

marily of the church, in its opposition to "the world." He has done with the exclusiveness that would limit salvation to one race or class; but he replaces it by another exclusiveness. Jesus "lays down his life for his friends."[1] He prays "not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me."[2] The love so beautifully typified in the Lord's act of service at the Supper, is "love for one another," — that is, mutual love within the Christian community. The real universalism of the Sermon on the Mount and the parable of the Good Samaritan gives place in the fourth Gospel to a narrower message, in accordance with the idea of the church. There can be little question that the evangelist wrote consciously in the interest of this idea. Living at a time when the unity of the church was in danger, and when various abuses were creeping into its life and sacraments, he

[1] xv: 13. [2] xvii: 9.

sought to remind it of its true character. He reads back into the gospel history the conditions of his own day, in order to submit them to the Master's judgment. Jesus himself becomes the counsellor and legislator of his church.

These subordinate motives can all be discovered in the Gospel, and need to be taken into account in any estimate of its historical value. Under the form of a biography of Jesus it deals with problems and difficulties which did not arise until after his death. It bears a constant reference not only to the events which it narrates, but to the situation of the church in the early part of the second century. These other motives, however, are always subordinate in the writer's mind. His paramount aim is the purely religious one; "that ye may believe in Jesus as the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life through his name."

V. NEW PRESENTATION OF CHRISTIANITY

We may now concentrate our attention on this supreme religious purpose which the fourth evangelist had at heart. His teaching is profoundly spiritual, and in its essence has little relation to time and historical circumstance. There can be no key to its inmost secret except that of Christian experience and faith. But to understand the forms in which this permanent message is expressed, we must think of the time when the Gospel was written and try to realise its conditions. The first century had just ended, and the new religion was passing through the most critical years of its history. Hitherto it had been proclaimed by Apostles or comrades of the Apostles, — men who were in immediate contact with the personal ministry of Jesus. It had centred its message on the enthusiastic hope of an imminent return of the Lord to judgment.

While extending its mission through the cities of the Gentile world, it had found its chief support in Jews and Jewish proselytes, to whom the original teaching was directly intelligible. But towards the turn of the century, all the conditions which had secured the initial success of Christianity underwent a change. The high enthusiasm of the early days had ebbed away. The last links with the Apostolic Age were on the point of severing, and the life of Jesus had faded into a historical memory. The hope of the Lord's coming, which had sustained Paul and his fellow labourers had apparently proved vain. Judaism and Christianity had come to open quarrel; and the younger religion had to seek its future in the great Gentile world, to which its beliefs and ideals and traditions were all strange. It was evident that if the church was to survive and to maintain itself as a living power, its whole message had to be re-interpreted.

Some expression must be found for the revelation in Christ, which would set it free from its mere local and accidental elements, and give it a meaning for Gentiles in the second century as it had had for Jews in the first. Our Gospel was written in those years of critical transition. The task which the evangelist laid on himself was that of interpreting to a new time and translating into the terms of a different culture, the truth as it was in Christ.

This task had already, in some measure, been attempted by Paul, who had stood outside of the original circle of disciples. In the endeavour to explain the Christian message to his own mind, and to preach it effectively to the Gentile world, he was obliged to clothe it in new forms. His faith was directed not to Jesus as he had lived on earth, but to the risen and exalted Christ. He construed in terms of a theology the truth which had been given simply and directly, through

a personal life. The fourth evangelist takes up the work of Paul, to whom he is indebted for all his main conceptions; but in two important respects he advances on the Pauline teaching. (1) On the one hand he transfers to Jesus in his lifetime the attributes of the glorified Lord. Paul, in his desire to emphasise the eternal meaning of the Christian revelation, had refused to "know Christ after the flesh." The one object of his faith was the ever-living Christ, who had now thrown off the form of a servant, and had declared himself as the Son of God with power. But this Pauline gospel, as later experience had shown, was fraught with a grave danger. It tended to break up the identity of the Christ of faith with the historical Jesus, and to empty the earthly life of all value and purpose. In the hands of teachers who were less mastered than himself by the genuine Christian idea, the views of Paul were already being developed in a

Gnostic direction. A doctrine of Christ was gaining ground which had no relation to any historical fact. The fourth evangelist seeks to reconcile the Pauline account of Christ with that of the Synoptic Gospels. He goes back to Jesus as he had actually lived among men, and invests him with the glory of that exalted Christ whom Paul had beheld in vision. Thus the higher significance of the Christian revelation is read into the history itself. Jesus in his human intercourse with his disciples is no other than "the Son of God who is in heaven."[1]

(2) Again, the Christian theology is presented in the fourth Gospel under Greek forms of thought. Paul was a Jew of Tarsus, one of the centres of Greek philosophical culture; and a Hellenic influence has been traced in not a few of his speculations. But the prevailing colour of his thought is Jewish. He was trained in the Rabbinical

[1] iii : 33.

schools, and borrowed from them the theological ideas under which he explained the new message. The fourth evangelist — though almost certainly a Jew — had entered deeply into the spirit of Greek philosophy. In his endeavour to set forth the inner meaning of the Christian revelation, he discards the Jewish forms, which were unintelligible to the wider audience he has in view. In a far more radical sense than Paul, he re-interprets the message. It is translated out of the language in which it was originally given into another, which in many points was alien to it altogether.

VI. THE LOGOS

The evangelist found ready to his hand, in the general thought of his time, an idea on which he was able to base his new interpretation. Greek philosophy was chiefly represented in the first and second centuries by Stoicism; and the central doctrine of

Stoicism was that of the Logos, or immanent Reason of the world. An attempt had already been made by Philo, a Jewish thinker of Alexandria, to reconcile Greek philosophy with the Old Testament on the ground of this Stoic doctrine. The Greek term "Logos" signifies "word" as well as "reason"; and Philo had availed himself of this double meaning. Into the Old Testament allusions to the creative and revealing word of God he had read the philosophical conception of the Logos; and had thus evolved that theory that within the being of God there was a secondary divine principle, the Word or Logos, which was His agent in the creation and government of the world. God Himself was solitary and transcendent, of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; but He had entered into relation with the world of time through that intermediate Power, which was one with Him and yet distinct. Christian teachers from an early time had

been drawn to this Alexandrian doctrine, more especially as Philo himself had attributed a kind of personality to the Logos. It was recognised, more and more clearly, that the Jewish idea of the Messiah did not fully represent the significance of Jesus. He was something more than a national deliverer. He had brought men into fellowship with God, in a manner that could not be explained by the current Messianic theology. Paul, though he still speaks of Jesus as the Messiah, the "Man from heaven" of Rabbinic speculation, is evidently reaching out towards some higher conception. In the Epistle to the Colossians the Logos theory of the Person of Christ is plainly suggested; and it meets us again, even more definitely, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. But it was reserved for the fourth evangelist to complete and to work out in all its bearings, the identification of Jesus with the Logos. He declares explicitly at the

very outset of his Gospel, that the Word which had existed from all eternity with God, sharing with Him in the divine nature, had become incarnate in Jesus Christ.

It is true that after the prologue with which the Gospel opens we have no further direct reference to the Word. Jesus henceforth appears as the "Son" or the "Son of God"; and from this it has been argued that the Logos conception was only an afterthought which has no intrinsic relation to the teaching of the Gospel as a whole. But a closer analysis seems to remove all doubt that the idea of the prologue is carried out consistently through the entire book. Jesus is the Son of God in the sense that he is a divine Being, eternally one with God. While appearing in the form of man, he is endued with divine power and knowledge and majesty. His sojourn on earth is only a brief interval in the heavenly life which has been his from the beginning and

to which he presently returns. At the same time his distinction from God is brought into prominence, as in the philosophical doctrine. Though one with God he is subordinate to Him. He does nothing of himself, but is dependent in all things on the Father.[1] All that he possesses has been "given" him by the Father, who is greater than he.[2] Thus in his picture of the actual life of Jesus the evangelist keeps before him the philosophical idea, and tries to give effect to it, on both its sides.

A historical life cannot, by the nature of things, be interpreted by means of an abstract philosophical idea. We must needs admit that in his endeavour to represent Jesus as at once Man and incarnate Logos, the evangelist falls into many inconsistencies. Not only so, but he divests the historical life of much of its meaning and its true grandeur, in order to bring it into con-

[1] v: 19. [2] xiv: 28.

formity with the Logos idea. We miss from his narrative some of the most striking episodes of the Synoptic story, — for example, the Baptism, the Temptation, the Agony, the Cry from the Cross. These could not be reconciled with the theory of the Logos, and had therefore to be omitted. No allusion is made to the intercourse of Jesus with publicans and sinners, which seemed incompatible with his dignity as the incarnate Son of God. The miracles are regarded simply as "signs" of his supernatural power and origin; and the motive of human compassion, so prominent in the other Gospels, falls out of sight. The prayers of Jesus cease to be true appeals for God's help and guidance. He is himself one with the Father, and knows beforehand that his prayer is sure of fulfilment.[1] As many things are omitted, so there are certain features added which impair the hu-

[1] xi: 42.

man reality of the portrait. Jesus knows himself from the beginning to be the Son of God, and is so recognised by his disciples. His life unfolds itself according to a pre-arranged plan, of which no part is hidden from him. He preserves an attitude of aloofness towards those around him, who are of different nature from himself. Though he has submitted for a time to the trammels of earthly circumstance, he is never merely passive, but orders his life down to its most casual details, and goes to the Cross by his own free choice. It is not the life of Jesus which is thus set before us, but the history of the Logos, who acts by the laws of his divine nature, though he has taken on himself the form of man.

We misunderstand the Gospel, however, if we regard it merely as the presentation, in the guise of history, of an abstract theological idea. The idea, when all is said, is secondary and external. It is only the in-

tellectual form whereby the evangelist tries to realise and explain the impression made on him by Jesus. As he reflected on that divine life, as he discerned what it had been to him in the experience of faith, he felt that God Himself had come near to men in Jesus Christ. All previous conceptions of the Saviour's nature and mission seemed wholly inadequate, and he had resort to the very highest category which the thought of the time afforded him. Jesus was no other than the eternal Word, — the representative and express image of God. Like Paul before him the evangelist had been mastered, in the first instance, by the actual life of Jesus; and his theology, like Paul's, has a personal love and faith behind it. The Logos doctrine is never so conspicuous but we can trace in the writer's mind this thought of Jesus; and ever and again the remembrance of the living Person breaks altogether through the theological concep-

tion. Most of all in the Supper discourses we are brought face to face with Jesus as he lived. He is no longer the transcendent Logos, aloof from the world while travelling through it, but the Friend and Master who loves his own unto the end. The Gospel owes its permanent place in the hearts of Christian men to this vision of Jesus, in his human personality, which lies always in the background. We feel, as we read, that the abstract theory is only a means to an end; and our ultimate impression is one of simple love and adoration in the presence of a personal life.

VII. THE DEATH OF CHRIST

The theology of the fourth Gospel is governed throughout by the idea assumed in the prologue, that the eternal Word became flesh. It follows that the redemptive work of Christ was achieved through his Incarnation. The emphasis is laid not on

the death, as in Paulinism, but on the life; and Jesus can say at the Last Supper, when the Cross is still in front of them, "I have *finished* the work which thou gavest me to do." [1] The Crucifixion was indeed the outstanding fact of Christian history, and the fourth evangelist, like Paul and the Synoptists, is careful to set it in its due place. From the beginning, when John the Baptist points his disciples to "the Lamb of God," the story looks forward to the Cross. Jesus is ever mindful of his "hour," and the thought of his approaching departure gives pathos and meaning to many a solemn utterance as well as to the great farewell discourses at the Supper. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the writer felt a certain difficulty in regard to the death. He could not omit it, as he had done other incidents, or assign it any place except a central one; yet it was irreconcilable with his theory

[1] xvii: 4.

of Christ as the Logos, who could not be touched by earthly change or accident. The Gnostic thinkers were conscious of the same difficulty involved in the death of Christ, and sought to overcome it by the strange theory that he did not really die. They maintained either that Simon of Cyrene who bore his Cross was crucified instead of him, or that his seeming death was of the nature of an illusion. The evangelist, with those false teachers in his view, is anxious to remove all doubt concerning the historical fact. He declares that "Jesus went forth, bearing the cross for himself,"[1] and establishes the reality of the death by the direct testimony of an eye-witness.[2] Yet in various ways he endeavours to mitigate, in the interest of his theory, the supreme difficulty of the Cross. He insists, as we have seen, on the self-determination of Jesus, whose life was not taken from

[1] xix: 17. [2] xix: 35.

him, but laid down of his own free will. He is at pains to show that the death was a necessary episode in the fulfilment of a divine plan. In recounting the actual story of the Passion he brings into strong relief the majesty and authority of Jesus, so that instead of a Sufferer we see a King, whose apparent humiliation was his "lifting up" to the throne of the world.

The evangelist, then, does not regard the death from the point of view of Paul, as the great redemptive act in which the life of Christ found its issue and explanation. He thinks of it rather as something which was additional to the life, and which itself had to be explained. Sometimes he describes it as the sovereign instance of faithfulness to duty,[1] or as the crowning example of self-sacrificing love.[2] Elsewhere he brings it into relation to his favourite idea of Christian unity. Around the Cross, as a common

[1] x: 11. [2] xv: 13.

standard, all the scattered children of God are to be gathered into one.[1] But there is one interpretation of the death of Christ which meets us continually in the Gospel and which serves to connect it, in spite of apparent difficulties, with the doctrine of the Logos. Christ was the Word made flesh; and by the assumption of an earthly nature he had necessarily placed certain limits on his activity. He had revealed himself under conditions of space and time, and only a chosen few could know him, and their knowledge at the best was partial and imperfect. By his death, all the limitations were broken down. He emerged from the narrow earthly life into a universal life, and could henceforth hold communion with his people everywhere, as he had once done with his immediate disciples. He was restored to the fulness of his preëxistent being, while he carried into

[1] xi: 52.

it those other attributes he had worn as Man. This is the characteristic Johannine doctrine of the death of Christ. The redeeming work was fully accomplished in the life; but through the death it became a lasting and universal possession for men. The corn of wheat was cast into the ground to die, that it might bring forth much fruit.[1]

VIII. LIGHT AND LIFE

What, then, was that work of Christ which he finished in his earthly life and which was set free from every limitation by his death? The Gospel offers a twofold account of its nature and purpose. (1) In the first place, through Christ we have the full and ultimate revelation of God. It belongs to the Hellenic cast of the evangelist's thinking that a peculiar value is attached to the idea of revelation. To the Greek mind

[1] xii : 24.

the highest good was identified with perfect knowledge; and for more than five centuries the great philosophers had been striving after that knowledge. It was assumed that the "wise man" — the man who rightly apprehended the nature of God — would raise himself above earthly circumstance, and become, in some measure, like God. The evangelist, imbued with this Greek idea, declares that God has now granted to men the absolute revelation of Himself. From the beginning He has been found of those who sought Him. In sages, prophets, law-givers, His Word has been dimly reflected, and men have been led by them to some partial knowledge of Himself. But now at last the revealing Word has appeared in very Person. The Light which in broken rays had been present to men from the beginning, had come into the world. It was the supreme service of the fourth evangelist to Christian thought that

he discerned the true revelation of God in the living Person of Christ. The objection has often been urged against the Gospel that it contains little of definite teaching. Its elaborate discourses are almost wholly occupied with sayings about the speaker himself. With all their claim to convey a fuller revelation, they have far less to tell us of the Heavenly Father, in His love and providence and will towards men, than the simple Synoptic parables. But it may be answered that by concentrating his thought upon the Person, almost to the exclusion of all else, the evangelist has truly apprehended, and expressed with a matchless clearness and power, the truth that underlies even the Synoptic teaching. Jesus himself was the revelation. He made the Father known to us, not so much by the words he spoke as by his life, by his whole personality, "full of grace and truth." Our knowledge of God is dependent

henceforth on an ever-growing vision of Jesus Christ. It may be granted that in his presentation of this great truth the evangelist is largely influenced by philosophical ideas that obscure much of its meaning. He appears to suggest that Jesus revealed the Father because He was Himself of the same essence, and made palpable to us the absolute divine life. A one-sided emphasis is laid on "knowledge," as if God were to be apprehended through Christ by some intellectual process. Yet beneath these wrappings of metaphysic, inseparable from the Logos theory, we can discover the simple religious idea that Jesus revealed God by the divine character of his human life. The knowledge by which we lay hold of him is something more than intellectual knowledge. It is bound up with obedience to his will, and inward fellowship with him.

(2) The work of Christ, however, did not consist wholly in revelation. As he

was the Light, he was also the Life, — imparting to men not only the knowledge of God, but the divine nature. In this conception of Christ as the Life-giver we find the central motive of the Gospel. It was written, as the evangelist himself tells us, that believing in Jesus as the Son of God we might have life.

"Life" is the comprehensive word employed in the Old Testament to denote the sovereign good. Joy, prosperity, peace, wisdom, righteousness, are all summed up in the idea of life, and God Himself is preeminently the "Living One." In later Jewish thought, life was associated in a special manner with the coming age, when all things were to reach their consummation. The blessings which God would bestow upon His people in the great future were all included in the one possession of "eternal life." It is in this sense that the word meets us frequently in the Synoptic Gospels. The

message of Jesus is concerned with the coming age, or kingdom of God; but the kingdom itself is identified with its chief blessing. Jesus can speak, almost in the same sentence, of "entering into the kingdom" and of "inheriting eternal life." The fourth evangelist takes advantage of this equivalence of the two terms, and discards the idea of the kingdom altogether. It was related to hopes and beliefs that were specifically Jewish, and he replaces it by the more general conception of life. At the same time he introduces an all-important change into this conception. Life in the Synoptic teaching belonged to the inheritance of the kingdom of God, and was regarded as still in the future. It was described as "eternal life," since it was part of that divine, eternal order which was presently to be inaugurated. But the epithet "eternal," as used in the fourth Gospel, applies simply to the quality of the life. The natural life is

something defective and unreal, little better than a state of death; and over against it there is the true life, offered to us by Christ. It is not a blessing of the remote future, but an actual and present possession. "He that believeth in the Son *hath* life."[1] "He that believeth in me is passed" (already by that very act) "from death into life."[2]

The evangelist nowhere declares in so many words, what he understands by life. His apparent definition[3] has reference rather to the indispensable means whereby the true life is to be attained. In the light of various passages, however, his underlying thought becomes evident. Life is primarily the absolute divine life. God is Spirit, and possesses an eternal, self-originated life, of a different nature from that of men. This higher life is not conceived, at least in the first instance, under ethical categories. God is the Living One, not in virtue of His love

[1] iii : 36. [2] v : 24. [3] xvii : 3.

and righteousness and holiness, but because there resides in Him a purer essence, analogous to the life principle in man, yet different in kind. The Logos, as one with God, participates in that divine attribute of life. "As the Father hath life in himself so he hath given the Son to have life in himself."[1]

The purpose of Christ's coming, then, was to communicate to men that life which, as the eternal Word, he shared with the Father. Man was by nature a creature of flesh, excluded, by the very conditions of his being, from the higher life. But through the incarnation of His Son, God had now allied Himself with the human race. What was formerly an impassable gulf, not to be crossed by any effort of man, had been bridged over. The higher nature had taken possession of the lower, and all who would had access to it and could make it their own. This, according to the fourth evangelist,

[1] v : 26.

was the meaning and end of the Lord's sojourn in the flesh. "In him was life," and we also can have life through his name.

Two things need to be observed and emphasised in connection with this primary Johannine doctrine. (1) The life, as we have seen, is not conceived in a purely ethical or religious sense. It is regarded from a metaphysical point of view as the absolute life which constitutes the being of God; and as such it is opposed to the mere earthly life which we inherit as men. The work of Christ consists, therefore, not so much in the renewal of our sinful will as in the actual transformation of our nature. He communicates the divine life as a kind of higher essence, by the reception of which man's being is wrought into affinity with God's. This mysterious change is symbolised by the miracle at Cana, — the "beginning of miracles," which was typical of all the others. As Jesus changed water into wine,

so he came to transmute our earthly nature into something richer and better. It is indicated, likewise, in the so-called parable of the Vine. In more than a figurative sense Jesus describes himself as the true Vine, — the living stem whereby life is transmitted to all the branches. A conception of life which can only be defined as semi-physical is involved in the whole Johannine doctrine; and in so far it falls short of the highest religious value. A magical element is introduced into Christianity which we cannot but recognise as alien to the real spirit of our Lord's teaching. None the less, we must here again distinguish between the truth itself and the form in which it is embodied. The evangelist is conscious that in Jesus Christ a new, transforming power has entered into the world. He has seen a change effected in the lives of men so profound and mysterious that it seems nothing less than a change of nature; and he

has himself experienced this inward renewal. To the moral miracle accomplished by Jesus he applies the categories suggested to him by his philosophical doctrine. Jesus was the Word, in whom the being of God became incarnate. The possessor of the divine life has imparted it to his people, changing their mortal nature into the substance of his own.

(2) Life is inseparable from a living person; and we can only receive the gift of Christ by union with himself. The life is in *him;* not in his teaching, or in any work performed by him, but in his very self. He can say, "I am the Life." The idea thus conveyed brings us directly to the heart of the Johannine message. Our Lord's purpose, as conceived by this evangelist, was nothing less than to impart his own personal life to his disciples. "I am the living bread which came down from heaven." "The bread that I will give is

my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." [1] Here, also, the thought is no doubt obscured by conceptions that to our minds may appear crude and half-material. The life is viewed as an ethereal essence, resident in the incarnate Word; and is only to be received by some mystical absorption into ourselves of Christ's actual body. Yet the truth suggested is the vital truth of Christianity, and the fourth Gospel, more than any other writing, has established its place in the Christian thought of all time. Our Lord's great gift to humanity was himself, and to receive the gift he offers we must apprehend *him* in his living Person. We must fill ourselves with his mind and will, and become incorporate with him in the whole spirit of our lives.

IX. MAN'S RELATION TO THE LIFE-GIVER

The higher life is imparted as an immediate gift of God through Christ; but

[1] vi : 51.

certain conditions are required of men before they can receive the gift. To set before us these conditions is the practical religious aim of the fourth Gospel. It might appear, at first sight, as if the evangelist simply took up the message of Paul. As Paul insists on faith as the one thing needful, so the later teacher makes the whole process of salvation centre on the act of believing on Christ. We find, however, on comparing the two ideas more carefully, that the "belief" so persistently demanded in the fourth Gospel is something different from the Pauline "faith,"—something much narrower and more definite. Its nature is indicated by the conjunction with "knowledge" in which it is so often placed. Where Paul contemplated an energy of the whole man, an entire surrender of heart and will, the evangelist thinks, in the first instance, of an act of intellectual assent. To "believe" is to accept the given doctrines of

Christianity, especially the fundamental doctrine that Jesus is the Son of God.

But while belief in itself has thus a restricted meaning, it is combined with other elements which give it something of the larger significance of Faith. We are reminded, on the one hand, that the intellectual act is morally conditioned. Before we can know Christ and recognise him in his true character as Son of God, we require to enter into full sympathy with him; and this sympathy is wrought in us by a life of obedience and loyal discipleship. "If any man will to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." [1] The prominence thus given to the ethical demand of Christianity is a marked feature in the Gospel,—all the more striking because of its pervading speculative character. Warned, perhaps, by the current errors of Gnosticism, the evangelist feels the danger of re-

[1] vii: 17.

solving the message of Christ into a mere theology. He holds that the true knowledge runs back in the end to practical obedience.

On the other hand, while belief is represented as nothing in its outward form but an act of bare confession, an emphasis is laid on the mystery involved in it. Through belief a man is brought into life-giving fellowship with the Son of God; and an act so momentous in its consequences must be the outcome of some profound and divine impulse. "No man can come to me unless the Father draw him." [1] The will of God Himself must coöperate with the human will, before there can be a true belief in Christ. This idea of a divine activity revealing itself in the Christian confession, is presented most fully and impressively in the doctrine of the New Birth. The doctrine is peculiar to the fourth Gospel, and

[1] vi: 44.

combines in itself various elements derived from Pauline theology and from early speculations on the mystical import of the baptismal rite. But it is ultimately derived from the familiar sayings in which our Lord declares that men must become like little children before they can enter the Kingdom of God. The evangelist heightens the original image, and in so doing throws a new suggestion into it. He speaks not merely of a return to childhood, but of a renewal of birth. The acceptance of Christianity is nothing less than another beginning of life; and this second beginning, like the first, is mysterious, and not dependent on our own will. We are born into our faith in Christ by the agency of God's spirit, which moves invisibly like the wind. Whence it comes, or how it works in us, we cannot tell; yet its influence, so real though so inscrutable, is the beginning of the new life.

By the act of belief, therefore, — which itself is preceded by a whole religious process, — we enter into such a relation to Christ that his gift becomes possible. But the belief is only the starting-point of another process, by which the work of Christ attains to its final outcome in eternal life. To understand this part of the evangelist's teaching we need to bear in mind his ruling conception, that the life bestowed by Christ is identical with Christ himself. How can we so apprehend him that he may communicate to us his own personal life? This is the crucial question of the Gospel, and an answer is sought to it along various lines of thought. (1) A peculiar importance is attached, in the first place, to the "words" of Christ, which are "spirit and life" to those who truly receive them. The words are regarded not merely as the vehicle of a certain message, but as a living and personal influence. To the ancient mode of

thinking, a man's word was part of himself. The word of God, more especially, is conceived in the Old Testament as the outflow of the divine Personality, carrying with it a quickening and creative power. So the words uttered by Jesus were a sort of effluence from himself. Through them he makes his abode in the hearts of his people, and communicates his own life. (2) Again, a place is given in the Gospel to the mystical ideas which had already begun to grow up around the Lord's Supper, under the influence of Greek and Oriental theosophy. In the long discourse of Jesus after the feeding of the five thousand [1] we have a whole series of sayings which can only be explained in the light of eucharistic doctrine. The evangelist's attitude to this doctrine seems to be a twofold one. He combats the superstitious belief that the Supper was valid in itself, apart from the discern-

[1] Ch. vi.

ment of its spiritual meaning. It can avail us nothing unless we can grasp the reality through the symbols and yield ourselves to Christ in the fellowship of faith. But at the same time a more than symbolical value is attributed to the sacred elements. If they are received with the true spirit they represent, in some real sense, the Person of Christ. Only as we partake of his flesh and blood can we receive into ourselves the divine life; and by the institution of the Supper the great miracle is accomplished. Christ gives himself to us as the bread of life. In this sacramental train of thought, more distinctly than elsewhere, we can detect the semi-physical idea that is interwoven with the purely spiritual teaching of the Gospel. Life is a divine essence, inherent in the Word made flesh; and as such it must be imparted magically, by a special miracle. (3) Once more, — and here we touch the centre of the Johannine message,

—life becomes ours through an inward abiding union with Christ, the Life-giver. Paul had already spoken of a fellowship with Christ so entire and intimate that the believer became one with his Lord. "I live, yet not I, but Christ who liveth in me." The evangelist takes up this Pauline conception, and develops it, on the ground of his own spiritual experience, to yet fuller and deeper issues. Life as it manifests itself in the disciples is the life of Christ, apart from whom they can do nothing. He makes his abode with them and unites them to himself, as the branches have their life in the vine. The question of how this union is effected is left in the end unanswered; or rather it is answered, as alone it can be, by a simple judgment of faith. Those who have known Christ are conscious of his presence, beside them and within them. They are made one with himself, and with the Father through him.

So it is by uniting us with himself that Christ bestows on us his gift. The Gospel describes how he sojourned with his first disciples, and how they were quickened to new life by their immediate intercourse with the Son of God. But the thought of that wonderful history brings with it a great problem. Did the work of Christ avail only for the particular time and for the small circle of personal followers, to which he came? Holding as he does that life must be transmitted directly from the living Saviour, the evangelist may seem to have driven himself to this mournful conclusion. He cannot take refuge in any theory of the perennial value of Christ's message, or of some redeeming act performed by him once for all. We cannot receive the life except through the Person, to whom we have access no more.

The solution to this problem is found in the deeper interpretation of a belief which held a cardinal place in primitive Christian theology. The early disciples, identifying Jesus with the Messiah of Jewish tradition, were confident that he would presently return to bring in his everlasting Kingdom. His earthly life had closed in apparent failure, but he would vindicate the faith of his people by a second coming, which would reveal him to the world in his true sovereignty. It was this hope that sustained the Apostles in the face of unbelief and opposition; but as time went on, and the Lord delayed his coming, the ardour of confidence gave way to doubt and disappointment. We have evidence in the later books of the New Testament of the mood of depression which was beginning to chill the energies of the church. To the minds of not a few, the whole Christian message seemed to have fallen to the ground with the fail-

ure of the great promise on which it had first rested. The fourth evangelist, however, falls back on the primitive hope and re-affirms it, even more strenuously. He declares that the early disciples had only been mistaken as to the manner of the Lord's return. The promise had referred not to a visible advent, manifest to all the world, but to an inward, spiritual coming of which none would be aware but the Lord's own people. And in this sense Jesus had already fulfilled his promise. By his death he had ascended to God, re-assuming the glory which he had from the beginning; and his return to the Father was at the same time a return to his people, in a closer and more pervading presence. The "little while" of his departure was not a period to be measured by months or years; but was merely the short interval between his death and his Resurrection. In the same act by which he rose again, he had

entered on his endless life; and from that time onward he had been dwelling with his people, — invisible, but even nearer to them, and more of a present help, than he had been at first. His earthly life had been subject to many limits and obstructions. He had manifested himself under the conditions of space and time. He had lived in the flesh, separate from his disciples, and they could only know him externally, as men know one another. His intercourse with them had been fitful and imperfect at the best, and had finally been broken off by death. But the limitations that had been placed on his first appearance had now fallen away, and he had returned; or rather he had continued, under new and larger conditions, the selfsame life in which he had been known to his disciples. We read in the Supper discourses how the Lord would henceforth reveal himself as an all-pervasive, inward, eternal presence. He

would be near to all his people, however they might be scattered over the wide world. He would dwell with them, not outwardly as before, but in their very hearts. Their joy in his fellowship would be uninterrupted by any earthly change or accident, and would remain the same forever. Thus the seeming departure of Christ had been only the commencement of his true and eternal abode with men. Those who had not seen, yet had believed, could hold communion with him as his own disciples had done, and could know him even more closely and personally. They could receive him into their hearts, and participate in his life.

This doctrine of the Return of Christ is complicated and partly obscured by the references to the Holy Spirit, which alternate with it throughout the Supper discourses. Almost in the same breath in which he speaks of his own coming, Jesus

tells his disciples of the "Comforter" or "Advocate" who would take his place after he had himself departed. In these allusions to the Holy Spirit we may discern an effort, on the part of the evangelist, to combine an earlier Pauline conception with his own characteristic thought. Paul had regarded the union with Christ as mediated by the Spirit, the new divine power which was now operative in the Christian Church. His idea of the Spirit is vitally bound up with his theology as a whole; but in the fourth Gospel it seems only to express, under a different form, a thought which is already complete in itself. The Spirit is another name for Christ. His promise of its coming is included in the greater promise of his own personal return to his people. So far as an independent value can be attached to the doctrine of the Spirit, it serves to bring into special prominence one aspect of the abiding work of Christ.

He had come as the revelation of God; but his earthly life did not exhaust the revelation. There were many things which he desired to say to his disciples; but the time was short and their hearts were unprepared, and he had disclosed only a little portion of the truth. But he bequeathed the Spirit to them as a permanent source of revelation. In the possession of it they would be guided into the hidden meanings of all that he had done and spoken. They would be enabled to read his past message in its bearing on new times and circumstances, and to develop it, age after age, to ever higher and larger issues. The Spirit, sent by him from the Father, would speak in his name, and its utterances would carry the same authority as his own recorded words.

In his doctrine of the Spirit, therefore, the evangelist gives expression to an infinitely fruitful thought, which has hardly

yet come to its own in the accepted faith of the church. He maintains that Christianity is not bound down to any unchangeable tradition or dogma. It is the absolute because it is the living and ever-growing religion. It possesses within itself an endless power of development, and of re-adjustment to new conditions and needs. In each successive generation its message is able to clothe itself in changing forms; while through them all it remains the authentic message of Jesus Christ. The revelation in history was never meant to stand alone. From our knowledge, rather, of what Jesus was when he appeared on earth, we can discern him still, and receive the new truth which he imparts to us through his living Spirit. The fourth Gospel itself is the grandest illustration of this profound and far-reaching doctrine. Writing in a new century, for a people of alien race and culture, the evangelist goes back to the

teaching of Jesus; but he does not simply reproduce it as it had been handed down. He translates it into new language; he interprets it with the aid of later theological forms; he brings it into relation to contemporary problems and interests, which had not yet emerged in the Master's own lifetime. Literally considered the message is different from that which had come down in the tradition. The words attributed to Jesus had not actually fallen from his lips, and the whole picture of his earthly life and surroundings is in many respects altered. Yet the writer claims authority for his Gospel. He is convinced that he, as truly as the Synoptists, is recording the deeds of Jesus and the words he spoke. For through the historical life he has a vision of the eternal life. The literal teaching has been illuminated to him and filled with new meanings and applications. Nearly a century had passed by since Jesus had de-

parted; and through all those years his revelation had been unfolding itself, under the growing light of the world's thought and knowledge. This later revelation — the Gospel would teach us — was continuous with the first. Behind the things which Jesus had spoken there were those which he had left unsaid, and which were now declaring themselves to his disciples through his Spirit of truth.

XI. PERMANENT VALUE OF THE GOSPEL

It would be difficult to over-estimate the influence of the fourth Gospel on the subsequent history of Christianity. Unlike the other writers of the New Testament the evangelist addressed himself directly to the Gentile church, in which the religion of Jesus was to find its chief fulfilment; and he may be said to have marked out the direction which the great stream of Christian thought was henceforth to follow. It was

due in large measure to the influence of his Gospel that Christianity remained true to its original character, amidst the many disturbing forces of the second and third centuries. At a time when the primitive tradition was in danger of perishing, this great teacher re-asserted it, and embodied it in new and living forms. He gathered up into one final utterance the whole message of the Apostolic Age. The Synoptic history, the theology of Paul, the hopes and beliefs of the early disciples were all harmoniously blended in his Gospel, and became the lasting inheritance of the Gentile church. It must never be forgotten that the primary aim of our evangelist was to maintain the faith as it had been at the beginning. From the age immediately behind him he received the message of the Apostles, and sought to bring it home, as a saving power, to his own generation. But in the very effort to preserve what was

essential in it, he was led to introduce certain new elements, which profoundly affected all the later development.

(1) He availed himself of categories of thought, unknown to the primitive age, which were derived mainly from the philosophy of Greece. These new categories were in many ways well fitted to express Christian ideas; but it cannot be denied that something was lost by the adoption of them. The teaching of Jesus became abstract and mystical, instead of simple and direct. An appeal was made to the intellect more than to the underlying instincts of the moral and religious life. The loss, however, was counter-balanced by undoubted gains. Christianity was now enabled to present itself to the Western peoples under forms of thought and language which they could understand. Not only so, but it was brought into alliance with new forces that worked henceforth for its enrichment. It asserted itself

heir to five centuries of Greek thinking. It was acclimatised in the general culture of the time, and penetrated it more and more with its own spirit. To the fourth evangelist, more than to any other teacher, the church was indebted for the mighty progress of the next three centuries. He transplanted the new religion from its Jewish soil into another, where it could take deep root and send out its branches freely.

(2) The early apocalyptic ideas were changed, in the fourth Gospel, into their spiritual equivalents. This was a great and necessary change, the full importance of which we are just beginning to realise, in the light of a better knowledge of the New Testament times. The members of the primitive church were unable to grasp the message of Christ apart from certain beliefs which they had inherited from Judaism. They looked for an approaching end of the world, for a visible coming of the Messiah

on the clouds of heaven, for a literal Day of Judgment. Even Paul, while he discarded the Jewish legalism, held firmly to those apocalyptic conceptions; and his teaching has constantly to be disentangled from them before we can understand its real import. In the fourth Gospel, however, the great Christian ideas are set before us in their purity. They are no longer involved in those wrappings of myth and imagination which in course of time might have smothered them altogether. The dramatic advent of the Messiah becomes the return of Jesus as an inward presence with his people. The judgment ceases to be a definite event in the future, and is conceived as something present and always in process, — a continual sifting out of men by their attitude to the light. By this dissolving of the old apocalyptic hopes, the evangelist broke away from much that was characteristic of earlier Christianity; but in so doing he only af-

firmed more clearly the essential Christian message. It was preserved for the time to come in its true character, as inward and spiritual.

(3) The evangelist made it evident, once for all, that the central fact in Christianity is the Person of Christ. No doubt he presents this great truth under doctrinal forms which belonged to a given age, and have now in large measure lost their value. It might be argued that the whole attempt to construe the Person of Christ theologically was a mistaken one, and tended to divert the church from its true mission. An orthodox belief came to be the one criterion of the religious life. Christian thought exhausted itself in endless efforts — futile by their very nature — to define the mystery of the Godhead, and the precise relation between the Father and the Son. For much of the fruitless controversy of the succeeding centuries the fourth evangelist must

be held responsible. But the controversy, however misdirected in itself, had behind it the great conviction which he had bequeathed to the Christian Church. Christ, in his own Person, is the revelation. Through knowledge of him and participation in his spirit, we have access to God.

The value of the fourth Gospel, however, is not to be measured by its historical influence on the faith and development of the church. It holds a place of its own, — sacred and apart even among the books of the New Testament, — as the devotional Gospel, which has moulded and nurtured the Christian piety of all ages. The tradition which assigns it to a Beloved Disciple is true in essence, if not in literal fact. We can recognise in the unknown evangelist one who had entered into the inner secret of the life of Christ. He has taught us, out of his own deep experience, how the Master who departed long ago is still a living

presence with those who love him; and Christian men have ever found in his Gospel the largest and tenderest expression of their personal faith. The language they have learned from it comes naturally to their hearts, when they hold their own communion with Christ.

The ultimate purpose of the Gospel was this which it has fulfilled, in ampler measure than the evangelist could dream of. He wrote a "spiritual Gospel," which should not merely record the facts of history, but should interpret them in their inward and abiding reality. He saw that the life which had once been manifest for a little time in a remote land, was the revelation of God; and he sought to detach it from all that was transient and accidental, and show forth its meaning for all time. Jesus who lived and died, was the Son of God. He is still present with his people; and those who have not seen yet have believed, may hold fel-

lowship with him and have life through his name. It is true that in this endeavour to portray Jesus, in his earthly ministry, as the ever-living Christ, the evangelist has modified and idealised the facts. As a work of history his Gospel is secondary to the Synoptic records; and its evidence must always be sifted and controlled by means of them. Yet it possesses an inestimable value even for the history. We cannot understand what Jesus was, while he yet sojourned among men, until we learn to see him, with the fourth evangelist, in the eternal significance of his life.

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